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Jimmy John's Workers Union--- Here to Stay!



Photo, IJWU

One thing about being a Wobbly is that you get used to losing --- you know defeat when you see it, because we see it every day. And having now had time to mull over the unsuccessful union election at Jimmy John's last month, one thing that can be said for certain is that Jimmy John's Workers Union is nowhere close to defeat. One poster for the JJWU sums up the feelings of union members, who went public in September, some of whom have worked at the sandwich chain for years:

"JIMMY JOHNS WORK-ERS UNION --- HERE TO STAY"

Going Public and The Election

The union drive at Jimmy John's - over a year in the making - went public on September 2, when workers at the ten-store Minneapolis franchise owned by father and son Mike ("Daddy") and Rob ("Baby") Mulligan and held a press conference announcing their intentions. Unsurprisingly, the Mulligans refused to meet with the union or discuss demands, and so much of Labor Day weekend was spent holding large pro-union rallies, picketing shops and planning the next stage of the campaign. In addition to these actions in Minneapolis, solidarity actions including pickets, leafleting and other public events were held in 32 different states around the country, primarily by members and supporters of the IWW. On Sept. 14, the union filed for an official union election under the National Labor Relations Board.

The weeks prior to the election were characterized bytypical union busting techniques from the company ---JJWU continued on page 9

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Editorial: Victories and Losses

Over the last few months, we have grown and matured immensely as a branch. In September, we hosted the General Convention for the first time, extending our midwestern hospitality to fellow workers from all over the country, Canada, and the U.K. While frustrations were rising with charges committee drama, we were out picketing with the Jimmy John's Workers Union in Calhoun Square. JJWU did a bike tour, rallying at stores all around Minneapolis. On Labor Day at the U of M, we threw a well-attended Labor Day Rally for all workers with hip hop performances by Guante and I Self Devine.

In October, we began to pick up a lot of attention from mainstream media about Jimmy John's Workers Union, including a fantastic article by Star Tribune about the IWW's history, increasing the visibility of our union and providing an accurate picture of what we are about. The election was nerve-racking and surreal. We sat in what used to be Hooters in Block E, with management and their lawyers on one side and fellow workers on the other (and there were a LOT more of us!) and held our breath as they counted the ballots one by one and over again. Yes, we lost, but barely. We came this close to winning, when Jimmy John's spent over \$84,000 on illegal union busting and we organized ourselves on the shopfloor. That alone is AMAZING. We've learned a lot and have come so far as a branch and I've never been more proud to be a Wobbly!

This issue of the Organizer follows up on the Jimmy John's election, celebrates the Starbucks Workers Union's latest win, addresses (in a very accessible way) an IWW preamble FAQ and has two personal essays by fellow workers. It also features artwork by the talented Jefferson Pierce who is an inspiring Fellow Worker on the Organizing Department Board. I hope you enjoy it!

Love and Solidarity, FW Angel Gardner

JJWU Election is Only a Beginning

Last month, the Jimmy John's Workers Union, an IWW campaign, lost an NLRB election at a ten store Jimmy John's franchise by the slimmest margin possible, losing by 1 vote. (3 at most: 85 for, 87 against, 2 contested yes votes with a tie being a loss, as the vote requires 50% + 1).

This election itself was of historic importance for fast food industry and workers who are among the lowest paid workers across the country. It is also a huge step forward for the IWW as a whole and our Twin Cites branch.

That said, this moment is not without grief. All of us had to grieve, and this grieving will be a longer process for some of us than others. Despite it all, we were so damn close to winning this shit. Broke ass Jimmy John's workers making bureaucratic labor union history. The IWW on the government's straight and narrow.

When we got together afterwards it started out as a pretty sad gathering. But as Lita and BK both said, while we started low, we didn't stay there. As time has crept on, it became more and more apparent that low is not really the place we're at.

THE ORGANIZER

A monthly publication of the Twin Cities General Membership Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World.

The IWW is a union for all workers, dedicated to organizing on the job for better conditions today, and a world without bosses tomorrow.

You are invited to contact the Branch Secretary-Treasurer or any Delegate listed below for no-pressure conversations about your issues on the job.

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Stories, letters to the editor, and belly-aching can be addressed to tc-organizer@riseup.net

Unless otherwise stated, the opinions expressed are not necessarily the official position of the local branch or the union as a whole.

Many of our members are engaged in active organizing campaigns, and some use an alias, occasionally their union card number, or 'x' number. We prefer transparency over secrecy whenever possible, but will always honor requests for anonymity .

We're realizing that we're stronger now, that we can continue to build this up, that there are lots of ways forward towards achieving our goal of being a majority union at Jimmy John's, and shit, we can find a way to achieve that goal. pretty sad gathering. But as Lita and BK both said, while we started low, we didn't stay there. As time has crept on, it became more and more apparent that low is not really the place we're at.

We lost one battle but we're in a war. We're not going to lose unless we give up and stop fighting, in this struggle at Jimmy John's or in general in a society that systematically attacks and undermines the power and livelihood of working people.

Our lives are not a game. We're not going to let winning or losing a government game—however close—determine whether or not we're going to continue to fight to improve our lives, because shit, we're still here. Votes don't make our our bills, our kids, or our dreams disappear.

We have continued to meet every Sunday, as we have been doing for nearly 2 years. Please keep an eye out or contact us for ways you can help. When we stand together in solidarity we make history. Fast food workers needs a new



Photo, SWU

future, so does this crazy society, so do all workers who earn less than the profits they make.

Get involved. Organize with your co-workers or peers. Join the IWW. Stand up, make history. We have a whole world to win.

-FW David Boehnke

Starbucks Workers Union Wins Recognition of Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

On November 15th, 2010, Starbucks announced that due to "partner feedback" (the company patronizingly calls even the lowest-paid at-will employees "partners"), it will begin recognizing Martin Luther King Jr. day, and paying the timeand-a-half most workers earn on the other 6 federal holidays it recognizes. A little research will show that the Starbucks Workers Union has consistently led the call for recognition of the holiday commemorating the civil-rights and labor leader. The win was achieved without the bureaucracy of government-sanctioned collective bargaining but rather through solidarity unionism

- that is, by workers voluntarily joining together and organizing themselves to improve their working conditions primarily through direct action.

This is an especially important victory for the Starbucks Workers Union, given Dr. King's importance to the civil rights and labor movements. Dr. King, who was assassinated in Memphis while supporting the effort of striking sanitation workers to form a union, was a staunch and outspoken defender of workers' rights including the right to a living wage and the right to join a labor union, a right Starbucks workers are often deprived of due to illegal retaliation and firings. The importance of the victory is far more than symbolic though - tens of thousands of Starbucks workers who work on MLK day will see bigger paychecks due to this big win.

"We're deeply moved to have been able in our modest way to increase respect for Dr. King's legacy while ensuring that Starbucks employees who work on his holiday are fairly compensated," said Anja Witek, a Starbucks barista and SWU member. "This is a great example of what baristas and all low-wage workers can achieve by getting organized and taking direct action in support of workplace justice issues."

While Starbucks claims to 'embrace diversity', it doggedly resisted the SWU's call for equal treatment of MLK Day for three years. The company based its refusal on the claim that its holiday policy was in line with the (abysmally low) standards of the food service sector. Through direct actions such as a massive write-in and raucous public demonstrations outside stores, the SWU drew public attention to the disparity between Starbucks' words and actions regarding its commitment to

diversity, citing the disproportionate number of workers of color in the lowest-paid positions in the company and its intense exploitation of coffee farmers including the Ethiopian workers who grew some of Starbucks' most expensive beans but received just 2.2% of the retail price.

"This is a great step forward and a moving victory yet we're mindful that there is much work to be done to make Starbucks a living wage employer that offers reliable work hours and respects the right of workers to join the union," said Daniel Gross, a former Starbucks barista and SWU member in New York City.

"We're thrilled to continue building the SWU and demonstrating just how compelling a model solidarity unionism is for fast food workers and all working people.

-FWs Dan Gross and Aaron Kocher

Do You Really Want to Overthrow Capitalism?

Someone asked one of us this question recently. The short answer is, yeah, we do. Our union's constitution says that we want the workers to "take possession of the means of production" and "abolish the wage system." We think capitalism is morally wrong. In our view, there is no such thing as fair capitalism or morally good capitalism — it's like child abuse, child abuse is always wrong. Capitalism is always morally wrong.



Here's what we mean. Did you ever think about why bosses and companies hire workers? The reason is that workers make things and perform services that the company sells. In general, employees make things or do stuff which employers charge other people a fee to purchase.

Employers take in money by selling the goods and services that workers make. The money employers take in has to be more than they pay out in wages - otherwise they start to fire people. Why else would companies hire people? What this means is that workers make more money for employers than we get in wages. We think that's wrong. Capitalist society is built around the idea that some people should profit off of others. We think that this is why there are so many people living in poverty right now at the same time that there are a few

people with incredible wealth. In 2009 loads of working people lost their jobs, but the top 15 richest people on earth all got richer.

Part of why capitalism continues to exist is that we can't get a lot of what we need and want unless we have money. Most of us can't get money unless we work for someone else. This means our bosses have a lot of control over our lives. If we lose our jobs and can't find new ones, we risk losing our homes, losing access to health care, let alone being able to spend money on the things we enjoy. Bosses know that if they fire us we won't have an income anymore. Many bosses use this to push people around on the job. We basically give up our democratic rights on the job. We don't have a right to free speech at work, for instance. The boss can tell us what to say and what not to say. We think that's morally wrong too, and many of us find it emotionally intolerable too — we hate how it feels to get bossed around.

For us, all of this is a good reason to get rid of capitalism. Because we want to get rid of capitalism, some people compare us to dictatorships around the world that called themselves Communists. That's not what we have in mind. We're against dictatorships, and we want to point out that workers under dictatorships often

have it the worst. We want to replace capitalism with a world that is more democratic. When we organize on the job we are trying to change the balance of power. Usually the boss calls all the shots. We organize to make it so that the workers have a lot more input. Of course, we can only get so far with this because we still live in a capitalist society. In the long term we want to organize every workplace to make them all democratic. In our view, in a good society, all people would have democracy on the job, instead of leaving our rights at the door when we get to work like we do now.

In addition to democracy on the job, we're for democracy off the job. We think that until all people have democracy at work, we can't have real democracy in the rest of society. Think about how many hours most people spend at work, commuting to and from work, looking for a job, and thinking about work when off the clock. Work takes up a ton of our lives, and work in a capitalist society is undemocratic. With so much of our lives spent in undemocratic workplaces, how could we have real democracy in the rest of our lives?

We also think that all people should have their basic needs met. People should have enough food, and safe secure homes, access to medical care, some access to entertainment and the arts, and so on. We think it's terrible that our society wastes so many resources on the lifestyles of a few super rich people while so many poor people go without the bare necessities. We think if we did away with capitalism this wastefulness would go away and there would be plenty for everyone.

-FW Nate Hawthorne

Editor's Note: This article reflects an individual perspective and does not reflect the views of the whole organization.

Why I'm a Wobbly

When I was about 6 years old, I went to hear Richard Nixon give a speech in North Commons Park, across the street from my house in north Minneapolis. He was vice president at the time, running for the presidency against John Kennedy. At the end of the speech, he came through the crowd, and shook the hand of a young kid (me).

I was so excited. I ran home, ran into the living room, and told my dad, "I shook hands with Richard Nixon!" My dad said, "Quick, go in the bathroom and wash it off."



Artwork, Jefferson Pierce

The political ideas that I initially learned from my dad played a large part in my eventual decision to join the IWW. My dad was a socialist and a strong union supporter. Sometimes he would march around the house carrying a paper bag like a placard, singing old union songs. He taught me that a person could commit no

greater sin than to cross a picket line.

Over the years, I became involved in a number of organizations and issues – opposing U.S. intervention and aggression abroad, supporting welfare rights, and others. Through it all, I had the idea that it was the working class that would have to really change society. Underlying all the issues I worked on I saw the workings of an economic system that gave most of the

wealth to the rich, while those who produced that wealth got little. An economic system based on autocratic control by the bosses, while the workers were fed the myth of electoral democracy.

Eventually I got involved in union work. I was an officer in an AFSCME local, and later I was president of a local of the MN Association of Professional Employees (MAPE). Unions like AFSCME and MAPE have the advantage of being wellestablished organizations with secure funding and a set program and purpose. Most are concerned with the welfare of working people, and recognize that organizing workers is the only way to address workers' needs.

The downside is that this type of union generally misunderstands the fundamental relationship between workers and the economy. They believe that cooperating with management, and working with politicians, can advance the interests of workers. They often become undemocratic bureaucracies, inaccessible to the very workers they are organizing.

My work in AFSCME and MAPE was in some ways fulfilling. I felt that I did make some difference for the members. But it was also frustrating. There was only so far things could go before running into the misconceptions of their philosophy, or the inertia of their bureaucracy.

I was searching for something closer to my own ideas about economic democracy, and workers organizing and fighting on their own terms. The IWW holds those same ideas. Still, when a friend, who was already a member, urged me to join the IWW, I was reluctant. I was involved in other issues at the time, and the possibility of organizing for the IWW at my workplace, which was already represented by MAPE, seemed remote. I also questioned whether the IWW had the capacity to be really effective.

Eventually, I decided to give it a try. I joined the Twin Cities IWW branch in December 2007. Initially, although there were some good activities – support for the Northwest Airline mechanics strike and participation in the anti-capitalist bloc at the Republican National Convention, among others – I still wasn't sure the branch could actually organize workers in their workplace. And I wasn't sure what I could contribute while working at a MAPE-represented office.

I stuck with it, though, and over time the branch has really matured and grown. Workplace organizing is taking off, most recently with an amazing campaign at Jimmy John's, but also at Starbucks and other shops. I've found ways to contribute, helping out with general administrative work, writing articles, etc. And I'm looking at the models of others who have done some organizing in workplaces already represented by another union, and considering what I might be able to do at my office.

I joined the IWW because of the ideas and values that started out with my father, and because of the encouragement of friends. I'm sticking with it because the IWW is taking concrete steps to organize working people, and move our society in the only direction that can make a real difference.

-FW Joel Schwartz

Getting
Schooled
Or, How I
Tried to Get
a "Real
Job"

This is the first of a three part series. Following parts will appear in subsequent issues of The Organizer.

Whenever addressing the topic of unions for "un-skilled" labor, one of the

inevitable responses is "Why don't you just go to college and get a real job?" I won't go into how that's problematic, because chances are you already agree with me. But as a working-class college student (who works at Starbucks), I can tell you that it's not easy. It's been a struggle to stick with it since I started college six years ago. You have to learn how to use not only academic language, but also how to speak "properly" in informal situations. You have to assimilate or suffer the consequences. Your tactics and way of thinking will often be criticized or ignored. Your narratives will be held up by others who are more privileged than you, making you feel tokenized and disempowered.

I grew up in a working-poor family that had to struggle and relied on credit cards and refinancing to get by. Just starting out, my mother and father raised me as a baby in the basement of an old house with concrete floors and a single mattress. My parents had an abusive



Artwork, Jefferson Pierce

relationship made worse by drug addictions and not surprisingly, my brother and I followed in their footsteps. I really started to feel the pressure to earn money when my parents divorced and my mother couldn't make the payments on our trailer with her \$8.50 an hour secretary job. I dropped out of school at 16, got a full-time job, and eventually my GED. I never really considered college as an adult. I rationalized it as I was too scared of the debt and knew my parents could never afford to help out. In reality, while the debt was scary, I mostly just felt too dumb and scared to try to go back to school.

I finally decided to go back in 2004. I started at Century College, a community college in White Bear Lake. I wanted to get into computer programming, because I was always hearing about how technology jobs are in high demand and pay well. I took a Women Studies class as well, just out of sheer curiosity. My boyfriend at the time balked at it, mostly because he didn't want me to stop shaving my legs, refuse to clean or make dinner, or become a lesbian (instead of bi). Funny enough, after I decided that Women Studies would be my major, I dumped his ass, ordered take out almost every night, and started dating a woman, but I still shaved my legs!

My intro Women Studies class was where I first began to understand what it meant to be oppressed, how that oppression manifests itself, hell, what the word oppression even means was new to me. The issues we talked about spoke to me: domestic abuse, sexual assault, sexual identity, class, and race. I'd always dealt with all these tensions, but didn't have the language to speak about it or identify it other than a feeling. If someone would have talked to me about class consciousness before I started college, I would have had no clue what they were talking about, but I realized that I was understanding it long before then. It was the feeling of inferiority and jealousy growing up in the trailer park of a predominately upper-middle class suburb. It was the impulse to lie about where I went for spring break, it was getting beat up and tormented

because I didn't wear the right clothes, it was going to a dinner party thrown by my boyfriend's parents and wanting to smack the condescending looks off of their faces.

I flourished in community college and began getting involved in feminist activism. The Women Studies program was full of amazing working-class women who shared many of the same struggles and we were constantly passing books back and forth to each other, excited to share our newfound knowledge. Tillie Olsen, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, Gloria Anzaldua, Joanna Kadi...the list goes on. I carried around a dog-eared copy of Michelle Tea's Valencia in my backpack to lend to whomever would read it. Our professors encouraged us to tell our stories, know our histories, and focus on activism, rather than theory.

Community college for the most part was a very positive experience, however; there were times where I was made to feel uncomfortable by professors. My English professor didn't like how I used incorrect grammar in the dialogue of an autobiographical story and felt that the "crude language" didn't add anything to the narrative. When I won the award of Outstanding Student of the Year, the professor that presented me with the award instructed me to highlight my "humble beginnings" in my acceptance speech which made me terribly uncomfortable to have hundreds of people (mostly teachers and staff) pitying me and looking to me as if I personified the American Dream. I ended up not having to do it, because my professor told my story for me, which made me feel even more disempowered.

Overall, I felt like I had so much potential coming out of community college, with an Associate's Degree and an Award in hand. What I didn't know is that an Associate's Degree can't really get you anywhere...not even a damn secretarial job! I also had no idea what was in store for me once I left Community College and moved on to complete my Bachelor's at the U. Only one person came with me to the U of M (who ended up being my sole source of sanity after transferring). All the other students I befriended ended up staying at community college for way longer than they needed to, dropping out, or getting their A.A. and going back to working shitty jobs while paying off student loans. I'm starting to think that they were smart to do that, now that I've racked up an insane amount of debt. Nonetheless, I headed off to the University of Minnesota feeling full of promise and ready to start getting involved on and off campus. Unfortunately, I didn't realize how different

community college students are from liberal arts college students and how it would be one of the most isolating experiences I've had in my adult years.

-FW Angel Gardner

JJWU continued from pg. 1

paying an anti-union law firm to run captive audience meetings where workers watched anti-union videos and listened to classic red baiting against the IWW from the company's legal rep and from Mike Mulligan himself. According to documents obtained from the Labor Department, management spent over \$84,500 (that we know of) on their union busting campaign --- almost a thousand dollars per "no" vote --- this while paying their employees a measly \$7.25 an hour with few raises and no benefits offered. Unfortunately for the company, much of their standard anti-union material had no relevance to the IWW (a fact that became evident in their meetings), and even their red baiting proved less effective than hoped. We spoke about the company's red baiting with FW Davis Ritsema (in an interview we hope to publish in the next "Organizer" issue), who commented:

"...it's not so much that people are scared of things like socialism, communism, anarchism,

but more that you have a group workers that is trying to improve conditions, but these workers who were targeted by the company were uneasy about being misled by the organization in terms of having multiple agendas, or wondering 'what does the IWW really want?'"

In addition, management was repeatedly observed violating labor laws with respect to elections --- including alleged offers to pay employees who opposed the union to be at work and get rides from the Mulligans to the polling sites, without actually working --- with the obvious intention of swaying vote results. Despite all of this, the union lost by a margin of only 87 to 85 - not counting two additional challenged "yes" votes. For this reason, the union has filed with the NLRB to cast out the election results as rigged.

"'Franchise owner Mike Mulligan decided to go beyond the pale. His managers asked workers to wear antiunion pins, fired pro-union workers, threatened a mass firing, implemented an illegal wage freeze, tightened policies and retaliated against union members, offered bribes, and pressured workers to vote no. He broke the law repeatedly in order to win, and he just barely won. That's not right. We are calling on the NLRB to set aside the results of this election.' said worker and union member Emily Przybylski."

Reactions From Fellow Workers

What we already knew well beforehand, and became certain after the election results were announced, is that our brothers and sisters at Jimmy John's are not about to give up the fight because of two three no votes. We quote below from Fellow Worker Erik Foreman, who works at Jimmy John's:

"We should be INCREDIBLY proud of what we have all done over the last 6 weeks, and five years. As an entirely worker-run, all volunteer group, we have broken new ground for the working class. We lost by three votes. We could have won. There is the support. It doesn't matter. This is about something much bigger than a 10-store franchise, this is about building a revolutionary workers movement for fundamental social change."



Photo, JJWU

Reflecting on the decision to file for an NLRB election, FW David Boehnke, who also works at Jimmy John's, wrote:

"If you had to ask me now if I think we should have filed for the election I would tell you "yes, we should have filed". Why? Because I think it made us stronger, and in forcing us to talk to everyone—and learn from that—it has given us a clearer sense of what it means to be a union, and what it takes to be a majority union, however created, with a member-run solidarity based organizing model."

Other thoughts came from local Wobblies who do not work at Jimmy John's, including this bit we quote from FW Erik Davis, who helped with the legal side of the campaign:

"It's astonishing how high morale is right now. And that's what I want to highlight as a real success. Those of us who have been involved in failed NLRB elections in the past can attest that losing an election is normally deeply demoralizing. But not here, not you, and not us. And that's amazing...."

"Having lost a rigged vote says nothing bad about us at all, and confirms that we are right, and that we have value, clarity, and honesty - all those characteristics that the bosses and their scissorbills lack."

Such words of solidarity and encouragement were not confined to the Twin Cities either. Messages of solidarity have come from folks around the country and even internationally, encouraging the workers at Jimmy John's to keep up their fight. One such message from FW Don Muhr of Nebraska perhaps put it most succinctly: "Reload, Fellow Workers!"

Thoughts are thus fixed on how to move forward, and enthusiasm remains high as ever in the union. Whether or not the JJWU is successful in their appeal to the NLRB to overturn the election --- which remains to be seen --- one thing is clear beyond any shadow of a doubt. If the union drive at Jimmy John's is any indication of what's to come in organized labor, then we in Minneapolis are watching labor history be made at first hand.

-FW Kevin S.

What is the IWW?

The IWW is a grassroots, democratic, volunteer-run labor union. We organize from the ground up, helping workers get the skills



and

support that they need to organize in their workplace and build a better life for themselves and their coworkers. We believe that every worker can be an organizer and



Photo from IWW.org

take an active role in changing their lives for the better.

What We Stand For

The IWW organizes industrially with a focus on solidarity and direct action. Our union was established to organize workers along industrial boundaries, not divide them into trades and job classifications. Every working person can join our union. Whether workers wait tables, drive buses, or build machinery, we believe they should be united in standing up for their rights on the job and demanding a better future. The IWW is unique in our vision: better wages and conditions on the job today and a world where workers run our own lives tomorrow.

Anyone can join! All workers, regardless of where you work, are welcome to join the IWW, even if you belong to another union. Joining is easy and as a member you will have access to resources, trainings and solidarity from other working people who have your back. Our union dues are staggered by income and range from \$9 to \$27 a month. Get in touch with us today to join!

Contact Us.

Mail - 79 13th Ave NE, Suite 103A,
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Organizer Training

Organizer Trainings teach workers interested in organizing their workplaces on how to talk to their coworkers, make demands, learn labor law and participate in direct action on the job.

Usually an Organizer training is two sessions and approx. 8 hours each. Per request by students at the U, there will be a special Six-Session Organizer Training at the University of Minnesota. Exact location TBA.

Tuesday, November 30, 4-6 pm Thursday, December 2, 4-6 pm Friday, December 3, 4-7 pm Tuesday, December 7, 4-6 pm Thursday, December 9, 4-6 pm Friday, December 10, 4-7 pm

Contact Arella Vargas (avargas I @macalester.edu) or Erik Forman (erik.forman@gmail.com) for more details.

General Membership Branch Meeting December 7 at 7:00 PM

Monthly business meeting for the IWW Twin Cities General membership Branch. Come vote on where your dues are spent! All members have a vote. Join us at the IWW Office in the Historic Grain Belt Bottling House at 79 13th Ave NE, Suite 103A, Minneapolis, MN 55413.